

# **Free and Reduced Price Application Guidance**



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School Food Services Section  
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

## Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>	<u>Q&amp;A Page &amp; No.</u>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	1	
<b>Free and Reduced Price Policy .....</b>	2	
Basic Requirements and Responsibilities.....	2	
<b>Public Notification of the Availability of Benefits .....</b>	2	
Public Release.....	2	
Parent Letter and Application with Reduced Price Guidelines .....	3	26-2
Application Distribution .....	3	
The Application .....	3	29-2
Foreign Language Applications.....	4	
Direct Certification .....	4	
Computerized Operation.....	5	29-3,4
<b>Application Process .....</b>	5	
Free and Reduced Price Reimbursement .....	5	
Benefits Prior to Processing Applications .....	6	26-3
Eligibility Determination .....	6	
Citizenship .....	7	
Complete Application.....	7	26-4,5; 27-2; 29-3; 32-6
Runaway, Homeless, and Migrant Children.....	8	
Approval or Denial .....	8	26-1, 5; 27-6,7; 28-4; 31-5
Computing Current Income .....	9	
Zero Income and Temporary Reduction in Income.....	10	28-6; 30-4
Temporary Approval Timeframe.....	10	29-1
Household Failure to Apply .....	10	
Notification of Eligibility or Denial .....	10	29-8
Reporting Changes in Household Circumstances .....	10	
Appeals .....	11	
Recordkeeping .....	11	29-3,4
Reduction or Termination of Benefits .....	11	28-7
<b>Determining Household Size.....</b>	12	
Household and Family .....	12	
Economic Unit .....	12	31-3,4
Food Stamp Household.....	12	
Temporary Assistance Unit .....	12	32-6
Categorical Eligibility.....	12	
Categorical Eligibility for Runaway, Homeless, Migrant Children ....	12	
Definition of Homeless Children.....	13	
Definition of Migrant Children.....	13	
Students Away at School .....	13	
Family Members Living Apart/Military .....	13	
Foster Child .....	14	27-2; 31-1
Child Living with One Parent, Relatives or Family .....	14	30-2
Adopted Child.....	14	

Institutionalized Child .....	14	30-3
Student Attending an Institution.....	14	
Emancipated Student .....	14	27-1; 31-3
Boarding School Students .....	15	
Foreign Exchange Student.....	15	
Joint Custody .....	15	
<b>Determining Income</b> .....	15	
Reportable Income.....	15	30-5
Income Exclusions.....	16	
Current Income .....	16	
Projected Income for Seasonal Workers and Others .....	16	
Self-Employment Income.....	16	
Farm Income.....	17	
Income from Wages and Losses from Self-Employment.....	17	
Military Income/Benefits.....	17	30-1
Income for Foster Children.....	17	28-3; 31-1
Income for Institutionalized Children.....	18	30-2,3
Student Income .....	18	
Alimony and Child Support.....	18	
Lump Sum Payments .....	18	
Garnished Wages and Bankruptcy.....	18	
<b>Confidentiality</b> .....	18	
Limited Disclosure.....	18	
Directly Connected Persons.....	19	
<b>Permissible Disclosure without Prior Consent</b> .....	20	
Disclosing Names and Eligibility Status Only .....	20	
Disclosing All Eligibility Information.....	20	
Recommendation for Notifying Households .....	21	
<b>Disclosures that Require Consent</b> .....	21	
Disclosing Eligibility Information to Individuals/Programs Not Authorized Under the NSLA .....	21	
Disclosing Information that Goes Beyond that Allowed Under the NSLA .....	21	
Requirements for Consent Statements.....	21	
<b>Requirements for Disclosure of Social Security Numbers</b> .....	22	
<b>Written Agreements</b> .....	22	
<b>Disclosing Information to the Medicaid Program and MC+ for Kids</b> .....	23	
Sharing Application Information.....	23	
Notification of Disclosure .....	23	
Written Agreement .....	24	
<b>Penalties for Improper Disclosure</b> .....	24	

## Questions and Answers

	<u>Page</u>	<u>Q&amp;A Page &amp; No.</u>
<b>Processing Applications</b>		
<b>Judgment in Determining Eligibility</b>	26	1
Quickness of Processing .....	26	2
Prior Year Benefits .....	26	3
Missing Information .....	26	4, 5
Income Information .....	27	6, 7
<b>Complete Application</b>		
Emancipated Child.....	27	1
Foster Child .....	27	2;28- 3
Income Not Listed .....	28	4
Racial/Ethnic Data .....	28	5
Temporary Approval .....	28	6
Reduction or Termination of Benefits .....	28	7
Notification .....	29	8
<b>Maintenance of Applications</b>		
Temporary Approval .....	29	1
Location .....	29	2
Computerized Operation.....	29	3, 4
<b>Income</b>		
Off-Base Housing Allowance.....	30	1
Institutionalized Children .....	30	2, 3
Zero Income.....	30	4
Rental Income.....	30	5
<b>Household Size</b>		
Foster Parents .....	31	1
Joint Custody .....	31	2
Child at Home Pays Room and Board.....	31	3
Rental Income.....	31	4
Family Elects Reduction in Benefit.....	31	5
Mixed Household.....	32	6
<b>Automatic Eligibility for Free Meals/Milk for Children in Head Start</b>		
Automatically Eligible.....	32	1
<b>Offering More Than One Reimbursable Lunch/Breakfast</b>		
Availability Extended to Free and Reduced Price Meal Recipients.....	32	1

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established regulations to carry out the intent of Congress that nutritious meals or milk be made available to every school student regardless of the household's ability to pay. This guidance sets forth guidelines for school officials responsible for determining eligibility for free and reduced price meals in schools that participate in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs and for free milk in schools that participate in the Special Milk Program exercising the free milk option or that provide free milk to eligible split-session prekindergarten and/or split-session kindergarten children who do not have access to the lunch or breakfast programs.

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## **Free and Reduced Price Policy**

### **Basic Requirements and Responsibilities**

All schools participating in the Federally-assisted National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs **must** make available free and reduced price lunches and breakfasts. Free and reduced price meal benefits must also be extended to schools participating in the After School Snack Program. At the option of the Local Education Agency (LEA), schools participating in the Special Milk Program may serve free milk to eligible children. This also applies to schools participating in the Donated Food Program.

The basic free and reduced price policy requirements consist of a policy statement, a public release, a parent letter, and application, the LEA's Methods of Collection & Meal Counting form, and the Income Eligibility Guidelines as issued by USDA.

LEAs participating in the Child Nutrition Programs are required by Federal regulations to adopt and have on file with the State agency, an approved policy of standards and procedures for determining eligibility and extending free and reduced price meals under the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Special Milk Programs. We have incorporated the standard uniform policy into the application-agreement. The policy statement **must** be approved by the State agency by October 15 of each year for the LEA to receive reimbursement for meals and milk.

## **Public Notification of the Availability of Benefits**

### **Public Release with Income Guidelines**

Prior to the beginning of school or during the first week of school, a press release to notify the public of the availability of the school nutrition programs and the eligibility criteria for free and reduced price meals and free milk **must be provided** to the local news media, the unemployment office, and any major employers who are contemplating layoffs in the attendance area of the school.

The public release **must** contain **both** the free and reduced price Income Eligibility Guidelines; however, the letter to parents and application for free or reduced price meals must **not** contain the free meal guidelines.

Copies of the public release **must** be made available upon request to any interested persons.

**Parent Letter and Application with Reduced Price Guidelines**

A letter to parents containing the reduced price Income Eligibility Guidelines along with an application **must** be provided to parents of all children in attendance at the school.

In schools participating in the Special Milk Program with the free milk option for all students or for those split-session prekindergarten and split-session kindergarten children who do not have access to the meal program, the free guidelines must be provided with the application.

Applications and letters should be sent to parents of all school children as early as possible in the school year, regardless of whether or not they were approved for benefits in the prior school year. Applications should be reviewed and an eligibility determination made within 10 working days of the receipt of the application.

New students enrolling in the LEA after the start of school should be provided a letter to parents and application when they enroll.

**Application Distribution**

A prototype of the family application for free and reduced price meals is provided in the Free and Reduced Price Application and Direct Certification Information/Procedures booklet. It is strongly recommended that the prototype form be used. If any changes are made to the prototype form the State agency must approve the changes before duplication and distribution.

**The Application can be Found in The Free and Reduced Price Application and Direct Certification Information/Procedures Booklet Available on the Web in May of Each Year.**

In schools operating year-round, applications should be distributed July 1 or soon thereafter so that households are provided with current eligibility criteria and eligibility determinations are based on the current Income Eligibility Guidelines.

Applications **must not** be provided at the end of one school year to be returned at the beginning of the following school year. Households **must** be provided with the Income Eligibility Guidelines and other eligibility criteria on or about the beginning of the new school year.

Distributing applications in the lunch line is not recommended because all students may not have access to the application.

The school may distribute the application at school or they may be sent in the mail. For example, the school could include the application in a packet of school-related information addressed to the parent, but carried home to the parent by the student at the beginning of the school year.

Applications **must** be distributed in some manner. A public announcement that applications are available and interested parties may pick one up is **not** sufficient.

- The determining officials must be extremely careful when reviewing applications. Careful attention must be given to the following:
- When figuring total household size, the name (s) of the student (s) for which the application applies must also be included in the list of household members.
- Foster children should have their own application because they are considered a household of one.
- Food Stamp case numbers are for the entire family. Temporary Assistance case numbers are for an individual child.

LEAs **must** organize their file of applications for free and reduced price meals so they can be easily retrieved by school. For LEAs with multiple schools, this may mean making copies of the application if more than one student is named on the form and they attend different schools.

LEAs **must** send appropriate non-English language parent letters and applications to households if a significant number of enrolled children come from households belonging to the same foreign language group and having limited English communicating skills.

#### **Foreign Language**

Applications are available in the following languages: Cambodian, Chinese, Creole, French, Hmong, Japanese, Laotian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, and Vietnamese. Contact the School Food Services office for a copy. It will be sent with the English translation. The forms may be downloaded from the Internet at:  
[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Translations/Default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Translations/Default.htm).

#### **Direct Certification**

In place of determining eligibility based on information submitted by the household on the application, the LEA may determine children as eligible for free meals or free milk based on information obtained directly from the State agency that a child is a member of a household currently certified to receive Food Stamps or Temporary Assistance.

Through Direct Certification, LEAs can certify as eligible for free meals enrolled students for whom there is a verifiable match with selected data provided by the Department of Social Services.

(See Free and Reduced Price Application and Direct Certification Information/Procedures Booklet.)



To be considered a verifiable match, LEA enrollment data and Department of Social Services data must be matched by specific identifying data such as name, birth date, address, etc. At a minimum, the student's name must be matched with at least one identifier, e.g., birth date.

While the master listing of Department of Social Services data should be kept in the central office, listings of all children determined to be eligible for free or reduced price meals must be compiled and easily retrievable by school.

A notice **must** be sent to households advising them that their children are eligible for free meals or free milk, as appropriate, and that no further application is required. The household should notify the school if they do not want their children to receive free benefits.

Letters or notices and applications must be distributed to households of all children at the beginning of the school year to prevent overt identification and to ensure that no child is inadvertently excluded from participation.

LEAs that implement Direct Certification are not required to send the letter or notice and application to those households eligible under Direct Certification **IF** these materials are distributed through the mail, individual student packets, or another method that prevents the overt identification of children eligible for Direct Certification. With this option, households eligible under Direct Certification will receive a letter notifying them that their children are eligible for free benefits, and other households will receive a parent letter or notice with an application.

#### **Computerized Operation**

In a computerized operation a school may send households an application with a child's name, the name of the household, and the household's address pre-printed on it. No other information may be pre-printed. It is the household's responsibility to complete the application.

### **Application Process**

#### **Free and Reduced Price Reimbursement**

The LEA or school **must** have a valid application on file for each child served a meal or milk, meeting program requirements and claimed for Federal reimbursement at the free or reduced price rate. A valid application is one which is complete and has been correctly approved for free or reduced price benefits.

### **Benefits Prior to Processing Applications**

Prior to processing applications for the school year, the LEA may claim and be reimbursed for free and reduced price meals or free milk served to:

- Children from households with approved applications on file from the previous year.
- Children from households that were determined eligible for free meals through the Direct Certification method the previous year;
- New children in an LEA from households with children who were approved for benefits the previous year, except that a child's categorical eligibility (child receiving Temporary Assistance) may not be extended to a sibling.
- Previously approved children who transfer from one school to another under the jurisdiction of the same LEA. If the applications are not centrally maintained, both the sending and the receiving school **must** maintain a copy of the transfer student's application.

Applications from the prior year may only be used for the children represented by these applications. Categorical eligibility may not be extended to the sibling of a child receiving Temporary Assistance.

Prior to processing applications for the school year, LEAs cannot claim or be reimbursed for free and reduced price meals or free milk served to new children who are not part of households approved the previous year or to children who transfer between schools under the jurisdiction of different LEAs unless the receiving school obtains a copy of the prior year's application. Therefore, local school officials are encouraged to expedite eligibility determinations for all such new enrollees.

A carry over of eligibility from the prior year is required. This time period can be up to the first 30 operating days of the school year.

### **Eligibility Determination**

Categorical Eligibility: Children that are currently eligible for Food Stamps or Temporary Assistance benefits and provide a Food Stamp or Temporary Assistance case number, along with the name and signature of an adult household member, qualify for free meals. The case number is a ten digit number and the first two digits are "00". The actual case number must be provided. The 16 digit number on the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card is **not** a case number and cannot be used to categorically approve children for free meals. Possession of the EBT card does not mean the household/child is currently eligible for Food Stamps or Temporary Assistance.

Income Eligibility: Review the income and household size information. Determine the total household income and the household size. If the total income for the household falls within the eligibility criteria, the student is eligible for either free or reduced price benefits as applicable.

Households that Provide Income Information and a Food Stamp or Temporary Assistance Case Number: If a household has provided a Food Stamp or Temporary Assistance case number and also reports income, the eligibility determination may be based on the Food Stamp or Temporary Assistance number alone.

## **Citizenship**

U.S. citizenship is not a condition of eligibility for free and reduced price benefits. LEAs must apply the same eligibility criteria for citizens and non-citizens.

## **Complete Application**

Each incoming application **must** be reviewed to ensure that it is complete.

Schools should require households to submit a separate application for each foster child.

A complete application **must** include all the following required information before the determining official can make an eligibility determination.

For all households not receiving Food Stamps or Temporary Assistance, the following information **must** be provided by the household before an eligibility determination can be made:

- Names of all household members, including the children for whom application is made and names of deployed service members in military households.
- The current amount of income received by each household member identified by source, such as wages, welfare, or alimony and how often the income is received. Also include the portion of income made available to households by deployed service members.
- Signature of an adult household member.
- Social security number of the adult household member signing the application; or, an indication that the adult signing the application does not have a social security number.

For Food Stamp households and/or Temporary Assistance units, only the following information must be provided:

- Name of the child for whom application is made.
- Current Food Stamp or Temporary Assistance case number for the child for whom application is being made.

The case number is a ten digit number and the first two digits are “00”.

- Signature of an adult household member.

For foster children the required information to determine income eligibility is:

- Name of the child.
- Child’s personal income.
- Signature of an adult household member.

For children of mixed households: If a child is not eligible for Temporary Assistance, but resides in a household with other children who are Temporary Assistance recipients, the application for that child **must** include all information needed to establish income eligibility for that child; e.g., the names of all household members, the social security number of the adult who signs the application or an indication that the adult does not have a social security number, the amount of monthly income received by each household member identified by the individual who receives it (including the amount of any Temporary Assistance or other welfare grant). The value of Food Stamps is not counted as income.

The household **must** provide all the required information on the application for the application to be considered complete. Any other information requested on the application but not required, (e.g., racial, ethnic data) and not provided by the household **must** not delay approval of the application.

### **Runaway, Homeless and Migrant Children**

Children that have been identified as runaway, homeless or migrant do not require an application. They are categorically eligible for free meal benefits if they have been certified as runaway, homeless or migrant by the local educational liaison. A list of their names, date of certification and signature of the local educational liaison is sufficient documentation.

### **Application Approval or Denial**

Households that submit a complete application which includes a valid Food Stamp or Temporary Assistance case number for the child for whom application is made **must** be approved for free benefits.

School officials may contact local Food Stamp and Temporary Assistance officials if there is any doubt concerning the validity of a case number.

Households that submit a complete application indicating that total household income is at or below the income limits for free or reduced price benefits **must** be approved for free or reduced price benefits.

Households that submit an incomplete application cannot be approved. If any required information is missing, the information **must** be obtained before an eligibility determination can be made.

To get the required information, the school may return the application to the household or contact the household either by phone or in writing. The determining official should document the details of the contact, date and initial the entry.

Exception: If the application is missing the signature of an adult household member, the application **must** be returned to the household. In signing the application, the household member is certifying that the information on the application is true and correct.

Every reasonable effort should be made to obtain the missing required information prior to denying the benefits.

Households that are not categorically eligible or income eligible cannot be approved for benefits.

If there are inconsistencies or any questions concerning the required eligibility information provided, the household's application **must** be denied, unless the inconsistencies or questions are resolved. The official may contact the household prior to denial, document the details of the contact, date and initial the entry.

### **Computing Current Income**

Households must report current income. Current income means income received by the household during the month prior to application.

If a household has only one income source, or if all sources are the same frequency, compare the income or the sum of the incomes to the eligibility criteria for the appropriate frequency and household size to make the eligibility determination.

If a household reports income sources at more than one frequency, the preferred method is to annualize all income by multiplying weekly income by 52, income received every two weeks by 26, income received twice a month by 24, and income received monthly by 12. *Do not round the values resulting from each conversion.* Sum all the unrounded converted values and compare the unrounded total to the eligibility criteria for annual income for the appropriate household size.

**Zero Income**

When a household reports zero income or checks the “No Income” box on the application, the approving official should issue temporary approval of the application.

**Temporary Approval  
Timeframe**

The timeframe for a temporary approval may vary depending on the household’s circumstances. In general, a suggested time limit for temporary approval is 45 calendar days. At the end of the approval period, the school should contact the household to determine if the household circumstances have changed. If there has been no change, the school should document the contact and extend the temporary approval. If the household circumstances have changed, the school should send a new application to the household so that they may reapply for benefits.

Exception: Zero income on an application for a foster child or institutionalized child is acceptable and may be approved for the school year.

**Household Failure to  
Apply**

Local officials may complete an application for a student known to be needy if the household fails to apply.

When exercising this option, the school official **must** complete an application on behalf of the student based on the best household size and most recent income information available and make an eligibility determination. The source of the information **must** be noted on the application form. Names of household members, social security numbers, and signature of an adult household member are not required. These applications should be excluded from verification. The household **must** be notified that the student has been certified and is receiving free or reduced price benefits.

This option is intended for use in individual situations and does not allow eligibility determinations for categories or groups of children.

**Notification of  
Eligibility or Denial**

All households submitting an application **must** be notified of their eligibility status.

Households denied benefits **must** be given written notification of the reason for denial and of appeal rights and procedures. The household **must** also be advised that they may reapply at any time during the school year if their circumstances change.

**Reporting Changes  
in Household  
Circumstances**

Households are no longer required to report changes in income, a decrease in household size or when no longer certified eligible for Food Stamps or Temporary Assistance benefits. Once approved for free or reduced price benefits, a household will remain eligible for

those benefits for a maximum of 30 days after the first operating day in the subsequent school year or when a new eligibility determination is made in the new school year, whichever comes first. (Exceptions: This provision does not apply when the initial eligibility determination was incorrect or when verification of household eligibility does not support the level of benefits for which the household was approved or when a household is given temporary approval.)

## **Appeals**

A household may appeal the denial of their benefits or the level of benefits for which they have been approved. The hearing procedures outlined in the LEA's free and reduced price policy statement **must** be followed.

## **Recordkeeping**

All free and reduced price applications, including applications from households denied benefits, inactive applications, and Direct Certification documentation **must** be kept on file for a minimum of three years after the end of the fiscal year to which they pertain, except if audit findings have not been resolved, the applications **must** be maintained as long as required for resolution of the issues raised by the audit.

For applications from households approved for benefits, the determining official should indicate the date each application is approved, the level of benefit for which each child is approved, and sign or initial the application.

For applications from households denied benefits, the determining official **must** identify and retain on file the reasons for the denial. Records should also include the date of the denial, the date the denial notice is sent, and the name of the determining official. These may be noted directly on the application.

For changes in application status, determining officials should note the change and the date of the change on the application and on any rosters used. When a child transfers to another school within the same LEA, a copy of the application **must** be retained at both the sending and receiving schools and the date of the transfer noted. If applications are kept at a central location, note the date of the change in benefits and the change in application status.

## **Reduction or Termination of Benefits**

Whenever there is a reduction or termination of benefits, households **must** be provided the 10-day advance notice of adverse action. When there is an increase in the level of benefits, the household **must** be notified and the increase in benefit level provided promptly.

## **Determining Household Size**

### **Household and Family**

School officials must often use their own discretion in making household size determinations. The following provides some guidelines:

### **Economic Unit**

A group of related or unrelated individuals who are not residents of an institution or boarding house, but who are living as one economic unit.

A group of related or unrelated people who share housing and/or all significant income and expenses of its members. Generally, individuals residing in the same house are an economic unit. However, more than one economic unit may reside together in the same house. Separate economic units in the same house are characterized by prorating of expenses and economic independence from one another.

### **Food Stamp Household**

Any individual or group of individuals currently certified to receive benefits under the Food Stamp Program.

### **Temporary Assistance Unit**

Any individual currently certified to receive Temporary Assistance benefits.

### **Categorical Eligibility**

A child for whom Food Stamps/Temporary Assistance is received is automatically eligible for free meals when the household provides a current Food Stamp or Temporary Assistance case number on the application for free or reduced price meals.

Food Stamp determinations are by household and Temporary Assistance determinations are by individual.

If the application is made for another child in the household who is not eligible for Temporary Assistance or who is not a member of the Food Stamp household, eligibility for the non-categorically eligible child **must** be determined on a household size/income basis. Household size would include both the Temporary Assistance/Food Stamp members and the non-Temporary Assistance/Food Stamp members.

### **Categorical Eligibility for Runaway, Homeless, and Migrant Children**

Categorical eligibility for free meals is also extended to runaway, homeless, and migrant children. Documentation to substantiate free meal eligibility for homeless children must consist of the child's name or a list of names, effective date(s), and the signature of the local educational liaison or the director of the homeless shelter. This documentation is acceptable in lieu of a free and reduced price meal application. Documentation of migrant status to substantiate free meal eligibility is a dated list with each child's name and the signature of the local operating agency or LEA Migrant Education Program (MEP) coordinator or the State MEP director. This documentation is in lieu of



free and reduced price meal applications and must be sought, as much as possible, prior to a household completing an application. Once documentation is obtained, the LEA must notify the household as soon as possible about the child's free meal eligibility. Any application submitted on behalf of the child would be disregarded.

**Definition of Homeless Children**

- Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because the children are living in circumstances described above.

**Definition of Migrant Children**

A migrant child is one who has moved across school district lines, within the last three years, in order to accompany or join a parent or guardian who has moved to seek or obtain temporary or seasonal work in agriculture or fishing.

**Students Away at School**

Students who are temporarily away at school (e.g., attending boarding school or college) should be counted as members of the household.

**Family Members Living Apart/Military**

Family members living apart on a temporary basis are considered household members and their income is included as household income. Family members living overseas or not living with the household for an extended period of time are not considered members of the household for purposes of determining eligibility, but any money made available by them or on their behalf for the household is included as income to the household.

Military personnel on shore duty living with the household or away on temporary duty (TDY) are considered household members.

In support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and possible future military contingencies for the purpose of determining household size, deployed service members should be considered family members living apart on a temporary basis and considered a household member. However, only that portion of the deployed service member's income made available by them or on their behalf to the household will be counted as income

to the household.

When both parents in the household are military personnel who are deployed, and the child or children are sent to live with a relative or friend or day care home provider, the child should still be considered to be a member of the original household that includes the child or children and his or her deployed parents. The only part of the parents' military income to be counted is that which the parents are sending back from deployment to support the child or children.

**Foster Child**

A foster child is a child living with a household but who remains the legal responsibility of the welfare agency or court. Such a child is considered a household of one.

**Child Living with One Parent, Relatives, or Friends**

In cases where no specific welfare agency or court is legally responsible for the child, or where the child is living with one parent, other relatives, or friends of the family, the child is considered to be a member of the household with whom he/she resides, and the size and total income of that household is used to determine the child's eligibility.

**Adopted Child**

An adopted child for whom a household has accepted legal responsibility is considered to be a member of that household. Therefore, the household's size and total income is considered in the eligibility determination.

If the adoption is a "subsidized adoption" (children who are difficult to place), the child should be considered an additional member of the household. The subsidy is included in the total household income.

**Institutionalized Child**

An institutionalized child is a child who resides in a residential-type facility which the State has determined is not a boarding school. Such a child is considered to be a household of one.

**Student Attending An Institution**

A student who attends but does not reside in an institution is considered a member of the household in which he/she resides.

**Emancipated Student**

A child determined to be emancipated and living alone or as a separate economic unit is considered a household of one. In some cases, an emancipated child may be living with relatives or friends, none of which are adults. If the household is one economic unit, all income and household members must be included to determine eligibility. Age is not a factor in defining an emancipated child.

**Boarding School Student**

A student in boarding school is considered a member of the household in which he/she normally resides. Therefore, household size and total household income are considered in the eligibility determination.

**Foreign Exchange Student**

A foreign exchange student is considered a member of the household in which he/she resides. Therefore, the household size and total household income are considered in the eligibility determination.

**Joint Custody**

Children of divorced/separated parents are part of the household in which they reside. Once a child is approved for free or reduced price meals, the eligibility is good for the entire year. There is no change in eligibility level when the child is living with the other parent.

### **DETERMINING INCOME**

**Reportable Income**

Income to be reported on the non-categorically eligible household's application for free and reduced price meals is any money received on a recurring basis including gross earned income. Gross income means all money earned before such deductions as income taxes, employee's social security taxes, insurance premiums, and bonds. Income includes the following:

- Payment of money for services, including wages, salary, commissions, tips, or fees.
- Social security benefits.
- Supplemental security income (SSI).
- Public assistance/welfare payments (Temporary Assistance, General Assistance, General Relief, etc.).
- Alimony or child support payments.
- Unemployment compensation and workers' compensation.
- Strike benefits.
- Government civilian employee or military retirement or pension.
- Veterans' payments.
- Disability benefits.
- Private pension or annuities.
- Regular contributions from persons not living in the household.
- Net income for self-employed farmers and businesspersons, rental income, and royalties.
- Dividends or interest on savings or bonds.
- Income from estates or trusts.
- Other cash income, including cash amounts received or withdrawn from savings, investments, trust accounts, and other resources, which would be available to pay the price of a child's meal.

**Income Exclusions**

Income not to be reported or counted includes any cash income or value of benefits a household receives from any Federal program that excludes such income by legislative prohibition (e.g., the value of Food Stamps).

Loans, such as bank loans, are not considered as income since these funds are only temporarily available and must be repaid.

The value of in-kind compensation allowances, such as military base housing or other subsidized housing, medical and dental services, are not counted as income.

Student financial assistance, such as grants and scholarships, awarded to meet educational expenses and not available to pay for meals (e.g., Pell Grants and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants).

Occasional earnings received on an irregular basis (e.g., not recurring, such as payment for occasional babysitting or mowing lawns).

Subsidy paid through the prescription drug discount card program

**Current Income**

Households **must** report **current** income on a free and reduced price application. Current income means income received by the household during the month prior to application. If this income is higher or lower than usual and does not fairly or accurately represent the household's actual circumstances, the household may project its annual income based on the guidelines identified below.

**Projected Income for Seasonal Workers and Others**

Income reported by a seasonal worker employed during the month prior to application may not accurately reflect the household's annual income. Seasonal workers may report their projected annual income as their current income. If the prior year's income provides an accurate reflection of the household's current annual income, the prior year may be used as a base for the projected annual income.

**Self-Employment Income**

Self-employed persons may use last year's income as a base to project their current year's net income, unless their current monthly income provides a more accurate measure.

Self-employed persons are credited with net income rather than gross income as described here:

- Net income for self-employment is figured by subtracting business expenses from gross receipts.
- Gross receipts include the total value of goods sold or services

rendered by the business.

- Deductible business expenses include cost of goods purchased, rent, heat, utilities, depreciation charges, wages and salaries paid, and business taxes (not personal Federal, State, or local income taxes).
- The value of salable merchandise consumed by the proprietors of retail stores is not included as part of net income.

## **Farm Income**

Net income for self-employed farmers is figured by subtracting the farmer's operating expenses from gross receipts.

Gross receipts include the value of all products sold; money received from the rental of farmland, buildings, or equipment to others; and incidental receipts from the sale of items such as wood, sand, and gravel.

A farmer's operating expenses include cost of feed, fertilizer, seed, and other farming supplies; cash wages paid to farmhands; depreciation charges; cash rent; interest on farm mortgages; farm building repairs; and farm taxes (but not State and Federal income taxes).

## **Income From Wages and Losses From Self-Employment**

For a household with income from wages and self-employment, each amount **must** be listed separately. When there is a business loss, income from wages may **not** be reduced by the amount of the business loss. If income from self-employment is negative, it should be listed as zero income.

## **Military Income/Benefits**

Military benefits received in cash, such as housing allowances for military households living off-base (in the commercial/private real estate market) and food or clothing allowances, **must** be considered as income.

The housing allowance for military personnel living in "privatized housing" (housing covered under the Military Housing Privatization Initiative) is excluded from income. However, the value of in-kind benefits other than cash, such as on-base housing, is not considered as income.

## **Income for Foster Children**

In determining income for the foster child, only the following should be considered:

- Funds provided by the welfare agency, which is specifically identified by category for personal use of the child, such as for clothing, school fees, and allowances. Welfare funds identified by category for shelter and care, and those identified as special needs funds, such as those for medical and therapeutic needs are not considered as income. Where welfare funds cannot be identified by category, no portion of the provided funds is considered as income.

- Other funds received by the child. This includes, but is not limited to, monies provided by the child's family for personal use and earnings from employment other than occasional or part-time jobs.

**Income for Institutionalized Children**

Payments from any source directly received by the institution on a child's behalf are not considered as income to the child. Only income a child earns from full-time or regular part-time employment and/or personally receives while in residence at the institution may be considered as income.

**Student Income**

The earnings of a student who is a full-time or regular part-time employee must be listed on the application. Occasional earnings, such as paper routes or babysitting, should not be listed on the application.

**Alimony and Child Support**

Any monies received by a household in the form of alimony or child support are counted as income. Any monies paid out for alimony or child support may not be deducted from a household's reported income.

**Lump Sum Payments**

Lump sum payments or large cash settlements are not counted as income since they are not received on a regular basis. These funds may be provided as compensation for a loss that **must** be replaced, such as payment from an insurance company for fire damage to a house, or they may be payments from lottery or other winnings.

When lump sum payments are put into a savings account and the household regularly draws from that account for living expenses, the amount withdrawn is counted as income.

**Garnished Wages and Bankruptcy**

In the case of garnished wages and income ordered to be used in a specified manner, the total gross income **must** be considered regardless of whatever portions are garnished or used to pay creditors. Gross income is the income received by a household before deductions.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

**Limited Disclosure of Children's Free and Reduced Price Meal or Free Milk Eligibility Information**

Any time information is revealed or used for a purpose other than for the purpose for which the information was obtained is a disclosure. The Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act of 1994 amended the National School Lunch Act (NSLA) to allow, without consent, limited disclosure of information about free and reduced price meal or free milk eligibility. The disclosure limitations apply to all the Child Nutrition Programs.

LEAs may disclose free and reduced price meal or free milk eligibility information to the extent authorized in the statute.

Disclosure of eligibility information about participants beyond that authorized by the statute is permitted only with consent. The entity receiving the information from the LEA, hereafter termed the “receiving entity,” may use the information only for the purpose authorized and may not share the information further. *LEAs are not required to disclose eligibility information.* Providing aggregate information that does not identify individuals continues to be permitted without consent. For example, providing summary information such as the number of children eligible for free or reduced price meals or free milk, but not children’s names. Parental consent would not be necessary since children are not identified.

The issues of privacy and confidentiality of personal data are complicated as well as sensitive. Therefore, prior to developing local disclosure policies, we recommend that LEAs discuss the disclosure provisions with their legal counsel. At a minimum, LEAs that decide to disclose information that identifies individuals must follow these guidelines. These guidelines apply to eligibility information regardless of the manner in which the information is maintained including, but not limited to, print, tape, microfilm, microfiche, and electronic communication.

### **Directly Connected Persons**

Persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement are Federal, State, and local program operators responsible for program compliance, including their contractors, to the extent those persons have a need to know the information for program administration or enforcement.

Program operators include persons responsible for monitoring, reviewing, auditing, or investigating the program. Contractors include evaluators, auditors, and others with whom State agencies and program operators may contract to assist in the administration or enforcement of their program.

Disclosure of program eligibility information is to be limited to those who have a “need to know” in order to maintain proper administration or enforcement of a particular program.

For example, persons having legitimate access, such as the school principal who has overall responsibility for specific programs within the school, are entitled to eligibility information. Additionally, the school food service director, cafeteria manager, and cafeteria staff who are responsible for determining free and reduced price meal eligibility and/or verifying the information, issuing the medium of exchange for

free and reduced price meals, or for counting meals served by type, are persons having legitimate access to free and reduced price eligibility information. Federal, State, or local reviewers responsible for reviewing and auditing compliance with program regulations may have access to program eligibility information for monitoring purposes.

## **Permissible Disclosure Without Prior Consent**

### **Disclosing Names and Eligibility Status Only, Without Prior Consent**

Determining agencies may disclose, without consent, participants' names and eligibility status (whether they are eligible for free meals, free milk, or reduced price meals) to persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of the following programs:

- Federal education programs, such as Title I and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- State health or State education programs provided the programs are administered by a State agency or a local education agency.
- Representatives of State or local education agencies evaluating the results and compliance with student assessment programs would be covered only to the extent that the assessment program was established at the State, not local, level.
- Federal, State, or local means-tested nutrition programs with eligibility standards comparable to the National School Lunch Program (i.e., food assistance programs to households with income at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty level, such as the Food Stamp Program or a State or local nutrition program).

### **Disclosing all Eligibility Information, Without Prior Consent**

In addition to names and eligibility status, LEAs may disclose, without prior consent, all eligibility information obtained through the free and reduced price meal or free milk eligibility process (including all information on the application or obtained through Direct Certification or verification) to the following:

- Persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of the programs authorized under the NSLA or Child Nutrition Act (CNA) of 1966. This includes the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). This means that program eligibility information collected for any one of the Child Nutrition Programs may be shared with another Child Nutrition Program, even if the programs are sponsored by different entities. For example, a public school may disclose information from children's free and reduced price application, without parental consent, to a Summer Food Service Program administered by Parks and Recreation.
- The Comptroller General of the United States for purposes of audit



and examination.

- Federal, State, or local law enforcement officials investigating alleged violations of any of the programs under the NSLA and CAN or investigating violations of any of the programs authorized to have access to names and eligibility status.

**Recommendation for Notifying Households of Potential Disclosures**

While not a requirement, we recommend that LEAs inform households if they plan to disclose or use eligibility information outside the originating program. The notice of potential disclosure may be in the notice/letter to households that accompanies the free and reduced price application or free milk application, on the application, or, for participants directly certified, the document informing households of the participants' eligibility through Direct Certification. Notification should state that the participants' names, eligibility status and other information provided on the application or obtained through Direct Certification or verification may be disclosed to certain other Federal, State, or local agencies as authorized by the NSLA. A list of the specific programs is not necessary.

## **Disclosures that Require Consent**

**Disclosing Eligibility Information to Individuals and Programs Not Authorized under the NSLA Requires Written Consent**

The disclosure of participants' names and any eligibility information that identifies them individually to programs or individuals not specifically authorized by the NSLA requires written consent. Some programs that may request names and eligibility information for which consent prior to disclosure is required include:

- Local health and local education programs and other local level activities. For example, the disclosure of children's eligibility for free and reduced price meals to determine children's eligibility for free text books or reduced fees for summer school requires consent when these are local initiatives and not State programs; and
- Any other Federal, State, or local program or individual not included in the statute.

**Disclosing Information that goes Beyond that Allowed Under the NSLA**

The disclosure of information other than names and eligibility status to the programs authorized only to receive participants' names and eligibility status requires written consent. For example, LEAs may disclose names and eligibility status to a Federal education program, but if the program requests family size, determining agencies must obtain consent prior to disclosure.

**Requirements for Consent Statements**

The consent statement must be in writing. It may be obtained at the time applications are distributed, or at a later time.

The consent statement must conform to the following requirements:

- The consent statement must identify the information that will be shared and how the information will be used.
- The consent statement must be signed and dated. In the case of a child participant, the consent statement must be signed by the parent or guardian of the applicant household, even though the application for free and reduced price meals or free milk may be signed by an adult household member.
- The consent statement must state that failing to sign the consent statement will not affect eligibility or participation for the program and that the information will not be shared by the receiving program with any other entity or program.
- The parent/guardian/adult must be able to limit consent to only those programs with which he or she wishes to share information. For example, the consent statement could use a check-off system under which the applicant would check or initial a box to indicate that he or she wants to have information disclosed to determine eligibility for benefits from a particular program.

## **Disclosure of Social Security Numbers**

### **Requirements for Disclosure of Social Security Numbers**

When disclosing or using the social security number provided by the household on the application for any purpose other than the program for which the number was collected, the LEA must modify the notice required by the Privacy Act of 1974 concerning the potential uses of the social security number. The notice must inform households of the additional intended uses of the number.

## **Written Agreements**

### **Written Agreements**

Prior to disclosing or using any information for purposes other than the program for which the information was obtained, we recommend that the LEAs enter into a written agreement with the entity requesting the information. We suggest that the agreement be signed by both the LEA and receiving entity, identify the entity receiving the information, describe the information to be disclosed and how it will be used, describe how the information will be protected from unauthorized uses and disclosures, and describe the penalties for unauthorized disclosure.

At a minimum, the receiving entity must be informed in writing that eligibility information may only be used for the purpose for which the disclosure was made, that further use or disclosure to other parties is prohibited and that a violation of this provision may result in a fine of not more than \$1000 or imprisonment of not more than 1 year, or both.

An agreement is not needed for Federal, State, or local agencies evaluating or reviewing Child Nutrition Program operations. Similarly, an agreement is not necessary for disclosures to the Comptroller General. These activities are part of routine Child Nutrition Program operations and enforcement.

## **Disclosing Information to the Medicaid Program and MC+ for Kids**

### **Sharing Application Information**

LEAs may share all information contained on the application with administrators of the Medicaid Program and MC+ for Kids, Missouri's Health Insurance Program.

Medicaid and MC+ for Kids program operators receiving children's free and reduced price meal or free milk eligibility information may only use that information to enroll children in State Medicaid or the MC+ for Kids Insurance Program.

### **Notification of Disclosure**

For any disclosures to State Medicaid and/or MC+ for Kids, parents/guardians **must** be notified of the potential disclosure and given the opportunity to elect **not** to have their children's information disclosed. The notification must inform the parents/guardian that they are not required to consent to the disclosure, that the information will be used to enroll children in a health insurance program, and that their decision will not affect their children's eligibility for free and reduced price meals or free milk. The notification may be included in the letter/notice to parents/guardians that accompanies the free and reduced price meal or free milk application form itself or in a separate notice provided to parents/guardians. For children who are determined eligible through Direct Certification, the notice of potential disclosure may be in the document informing parents/guardians of their children's eligibility for free meals through Direct Certification. The notice must be given prior to the disclosure and parents/guardians should be given a reasonable time limit to respond.

It is suggested that parents/guardians be given a minimum of 10 calendar days as a reasonable time in which to respond to a request that information not be disclosed. Additionally, in the event that a parent or guardian notifies the LEA past the deadline that he or she chooses not to permit disclosure of the child's eligibility, it would be prudent for the LEA to inform the recipient agency not to make any further use of that child's eligibility information.

A "Prototype Parent/Guardian Notification for Medicaid/MC+ for Kids" is provided on page 25.

**LEAs must have a Written Agreement with Medicaid and/or MC+ for Kids**

The LEA must have a written agreement with Medicaid and/or MC+ for Kids prior to disclosing children's free and reduced price meal or free milk eligibility information. At a minimum, the agreement must identify the health insurance program or health agency receiving children's eligibility information, describe the information that will be disclosed and specify that the information must only be used to seek to enroll children in State Medicaid or MC+ for Kids, describe how the information will be protected from unauthorized uses and disclosures, describe the penalties for unauthorized disclosure, and be signed by both the LEA and the State Medicaid/MC+ for Kids.

**Penalties for Improper Disclosure**

**Improper Disclosure**

The NSLA establishes a fine of not more than \$1000 or imprisonment of not more than 1 year, or both, for publishing, divulging, disclosing, or making known in any manner or extent not authorized by Federal law, any eligibility information. This includes the disclosure of eligibility information by one entity authorized under the NSLA to receive the information to any other entity, even if that entity would otherwise be authorized to receive the information directly from the LEA. For example, a State or local agency administering Medicaid and/or MC+ for Kids, which has received eligibility information from a LEA through a written agreement between the two agencies, may not disclose that information to any other health insurance program or health agency that is not a party to the written agreement.

## Prototype Parent/Guardian Notification for Medicaid/MC+ for Kids

Dear Parent/Guardian

Children with health insurance are more likely to get preventive health care and care when they are sick. This results in fewer absences from school because of illness and children coming to school ready to learn. If your children do not have health insurance, you will be interested to know that many families getting free and reduced price school meals can also get free or low-cost health insurance for their children. However, many families do not know about the health insurance programs available to them.

The law now allows us to share your free and reduced price meal eligibility information with Medicaid and MC+ for Kids, Missouri's Health Insurance Program. Medicaid and MC+ for Kids can only use the information to identify children who may be eligible for free or low-cost health insurance and to enroll them in either Medicaid or MC+ for Kids. They are not allowed to use the information from your free and reduced price application for any other purpose. Medicaid officials or officials with MC+ for Kids may contact you to get more information.

You are not required to allow us to share information from your children's application for free and reduced price meals with Medicaid or MC+ for Kids. It will not affect your children's eligibility for free and reduced price meals. If you do **not** want your information shared with Medicaid or MC+ for Kids, you must let us know. You must complete the form below and send it back to your children's school by (insert date), if you do not want your children's free and reduced price meal eligibility information shared with Medicaid or MC+ for Kids. If you want further information, you may call (name of a school contact person) at (phone).

☐ I **do not** want school officials to share information from my application for free and reduced price meals with Medicaid or MC+ for Kids.

<b>Child's Name</b> _____	<b>School</b> _____
<b>Child's Name</b> _____	<b>School</b> _____
<b>Child's Name</b> _____	<b>School</b> _____

<b>Signature of Parent/Guardian</b> _____	<b>Date</b> _____
---	-------------------

**Printed name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### **Processing Applications for Free and Reduced Price Meals**

1. Q: How much judgment or discretion may a LEA exercise in determining whether a household does or does not meet the eligibility criteria for benefits?  
  
A: Determining officials will occasionally have to apply the broad concepts set forth in this guidance to some individual situations. The determining official should contact the State agency in unusual situations.
2. Q: How quickly should I process applications?  
  
A: Applications for free or reduced price meals should be reviewed and an eligibility determination made within 10 working days of the receipt of the application. Whenever possible, applications should be processed immediately, particularly for new students who do not have approved applications on file from the previous year.
3. Q: If a student leaves the LEA late in the school year (e.g. in March) and returns at the beginning of the next school year, **must** the student be fed based on last year's application for free and reduced price meals prior to approval of a new application?  
  
A: Yes, if the student was eligible for benefits when the household left the LEA, he/she will be able to receive benefits up to the first 30 operating days of the new school year.
4. Q: If any required information is missing from the application, may the determining official make an eligibility determination on the basis of a sibling's application?  
  
A: A determining official may look to a sibling's application for any item of required information, except Temporary Assistance case numbers. Since Temporary Assistance categorical eligibility is on an individual basis, the determining official **must** either contact the household for the information or consider the application incomplete.  
  
The official may staple the applications together; or photocopy the complete application and staple the photocopy to the incomplete application; or transfer the information from the complete application, initialing it and noting the source of the information. The complete application must be readily available for review.
5. Q: If any required information is missing from the application, may the determining official complete the application for the household using information derived from other records available to the school?  
  
A: No required information may be derived from a source other than the household or a sibling's application for free and reduced price meals.

6. Q: A household voluntarily provided pay stubs with the application which conflict with the income information on the application. According to the income information on the application, the household is eligible for benefits. From the pay stubs, it appears that the household is not eligible. What should the determining official do?
- A: The submission of eligibility information that does not support the content of the application **must not** affect the initial eligibility determination. The determining official **must** approve or deny the application on face value and notify the household of the initial eligibility determination. Whenever the household submits eligibility information, either voluntarily or as required by the school, that does not confirm the level of benefits for which the household has been approved, the school official **must** take appropriate action. When this occurs at the time the application is turned in to the school, the school may combine the notice of approval with the notice of adverse action in a single letter. This provides the household opportunity to resolve the discrepancy during the 10-day advance notice of adverse action. When the determining official believes that the household may have additional information substantiating the eligibility determination, the school may combine the notice of approval with the notice of selection for verification to give the household an opportunity to submit additional documentation to confirm eligibility. The inconsistency **must** be resolved.
7. Q: A household voluntarily provided pay stubs with the application, but did not write the amount of each person's income on the application. All other items were completed. According to the pay stubs, the household is eligible for benefits. What should the determining official do?
- A: The determining official may contact the household, by phone or in writing, to ensure that the household submitted all documentation of income. The official should document the contact, enter the information on the application and initial and date the action.

### **Complete Application for Free and Reduced Price Meals**

1. Q: Does an emancipated child sign his/her own application? Is a social security number required?
- A: An emancipated child **must** sign his or her own application. No social security number is required.
2. Q: Who signs the application for a foster child?
- A: The foster parent/guardian or other official representative for the child **must** sign the application for a foster child.

3. Q: Does income have to be indicated on the application for a foster child?
- A: Yes. The child's personal income **must** be considered for the eligibility determination. A foster child's income includes funds, provided by the welfare agency, which are specifically identified by category for the personal use of the child, such as for clothing, school fees, and allowances. Other funds received by the child are included as income; i.e., income a child earns for full-time or regular part-time employment, and money provided by the child's family for personal use. If no funds are specifically identified for personal use, income should be listed as "0" and the application should be approved for a full year. The foster parents'/guardians' income, household size, and social security number are not needed on the application. This also applies to applications for children residing in residential child care institutions.
4. Q: What if the income is not listed on an application? Is it considered zero or should the LEA contact the household for additional information?
- A: If income is not listed on the application, the determining official should contact the household for additional information. If the determining official is unable to contact the household, the application **must** be denied because it is incomplete.
5. Q: What if the racial/ethnic data collection question is not completed?
- A: Parents' provision of this information is voluntary, and failure to provide the information **must not** affect the child's eligibility for benefits. The "race" section on the application may be completed by school personnel and initialed. LEAs are required to develop alternative means of obtaining racial and ethnic data for applicants when such information is not voluntarily provided.
6. Q: What applications may be considered for temporary approval?
- A: Applications receiving temporary approval may include those from households affected by temporary layoffs, strikes, temporary receipt of public assistance, and zero income. Zero income may be acceptable for a foster child or institutionalized child.
- Determining officials should use their own judgement and consider temporary approval for other questionable situations.
7. Q: An application was approved for benefits and the household notified. During a review of the applications later in the school year, the reviewer discovered that the determining official had erred and that the information on the application did not support the household's eligibility for benefits. What should be done?
- A: The household must be notified that a change in benefit level will occur. Whenever there is a reduction or termination of benefits, households **must** be provided the 10-day advance notice of adverse action. When there is an increase in the level of benefits, the household **must** be notified and the increase in benefit level provided promptly.



8. Q: What kind of notice is recommended for children determined to be eligible for free or reduced price meals?
- A: Households **must** be notified of their eligibility for benefits. LEAs should notify households of their child's eligibility for free or reduced price benefits either in writing or by phone. Households denied benefits **must** be notified in writing.

### **Maintenance of Applications for Free and Reduced Price Meals**

1. Q: If the determining official temporarily approves an application, and after the temporary approval period knows that circumstances have not changed, is the household contacted or may the temporary approval be extended?
- A: After the temporary approval period each household should be contacted again and offered an opportunity to report changes in household size and income information.
2. Q: Do applications have to be maintained at the school or may they be maintained at a central location with a list of eligible students maintained at the school?
- A: Individual schools, in a multi-school LEA, do not need to keep copies of the applications on-site. The LEA can send only the Master List of Approved Free and Reduced Price Students to the schools. The applications can be kept on file at a central location. The applications **must** be retrievable by school, and the LEA **must** ensure that changes in eligibility status and transfers in and out of the school are accurately reflected on each school's list within 3 operating days.
3. Q: In a computerized operation, where the computer generates the determination, does the determining official have to sign or initial each application?
- A: No. The determining official may sign/initial and date a sheet of paper which would then be attached to a batch of applications. The computer system should indicate the original date of approval and update the status of the applications to account for transfers, withdrawals, terminations, and other changes.
4. Q: May changes in status of an application may be maintained in a computer instead of being noted on the application?
- A: Yes. Changes in the status of an application may be maintained in a computer instead of being noted on the application. School officials **must** ensure that the changes are readily retrievable by school and are provided to State and Federal reviewers along with the applications during a review.

## Income

1. Q: Why is the off-base housing allowance (commercial/private real estate market) provided to military personnel counted as income when the value of on-base housing is not?  
  
A: Income is defined as all cash received on a recurring basis. In-kind benefits, by definition, are not cash payments, and, therefore, are not considered as income for the purpose of determining free and reduced price eligibility. School officials are not in a position to determine the value of in-kind benefits, such as housing for clergy, cars for salespersons, employee medical or dental benefits, etc. The income exclusion for in-kind benefits is uniform throughout the school meal programs. To treat in-kind benefits provided to military households differently from in-kind benefits provided to the general population would create an inequity. The fact that the value of military on-base housing is more readily identifiable than other sources of in-kind benefits would not lessen the inequity.
2. Q: What income is reported for students who reside in an institution?  
  
A: Payments from any source, directly received by the institution on the child's behalf, are not considered as income to the child. However, the money a child personally receives or earns from any full-time or regular part-time source is considered income.
3. Q: Is an application with household size and income information required for students who reside in an institution and attend public school during the day?  
  
A: Yes. The day school **must** have an application on file for each child for whom a free or reduced price meal is served and claimed for reimbursement, regardless of the child's place of residence.  
  
Institutionalized children are not to be categorically certified as eligible for free or reduced price benefits. A record of each child's income, even if "0," **must** be identified on the meal benefit form.
4. Q: If the household indicates \$0 for income, is that sufficient?  
  
A: "Zero income" is sufficient for a temporary approval. School officials should confirm the continued eligibility of a zero income application every 45 days. Some circumstances may warrant approval of a zero income application for the school year, such as for the foster or institutionalized child.
5. Q: If one household owns a housing unit and rents living space to another household, does the household receiving the rental fee have to report this amount as income?  
  
A: Yes. If a household receives rental income from another household, it **must** be included as income. The treatment of rental income would be similar to the treatment of self-employment income.

## Household Size

1. Q: When foster parents apply for benefits for their own children, do they include their foster children as household members, and do foster parents include the payments provided by the welfare agency for care of the foster children as income to the household?  
  
A: No. Since each foster child, including a preschool foster child, is a household of one, foster children are not included in the foster parents' household. Payments received by the household for care of the foster child are intended to be used for the foster child and are not included as part of the foster parents' income.
2. Q: How do I handle joint custody of a child?  
  
A: In cases where joint custody has been awarded, the child is part of the household where he/she resides. Once a child is approved for free or reduced price meals, the eligibility is good for the entire year.
3. Q: What if a child lives with his/her parents and is required to pay for room and board? Is the child a separate household?  
  
A: No. The family continues to have legal responsibility for the child. The child may be considered a separate household only in those cases where the court has declared the child to be emancipated.
4. Q: Two separate households rent living space (e.g., an apartment or house). One household gives its portion of the rent to the other household which transmits the full rent to the landlord. Does the rent amount given to the transmitting household count as rental income?  
  
A: No. The transmitting household has not received income.
5. Q: What if a child is eligible for free meals, but the household wants to pay the reduced price?  
  
A: The school should respect the family's wishes and allow the child to pay the reduced price charge. The application for free or reduced price meals should correctly reflect that the child is eligible for free meals. The school should note on the application that the family has elected to pay the reduced price charge. The meals served to such a child **must** be claimed for reduced price reimbursement since the school received the reduced price payment from the household.

6. Q: How does the determining official determine the eligibility of a household that has some children who are receiving Temporary Assistance and other children who are not?
- A: Children receiving Temporary Assistance are categorically eligible for free benefits. The application for such children need only contain the child's name, a current Temporary Assistance case number, and the signature of an adult household member. For children in the same household who do not receive Temporary Assistance the application **must** include the information required of all other households; i.e., names of all household members; the amount of monthly income each household member receives, where it comes from (including the amount of Temporary Assistance or other welfare grant); the signature of an adult household member; and social security number of the member or an indication that the household member does not have a social security number.

#### **Automatic Eligibility for Free Meals/Milk for Children Enrolled in a Head Start Program**

1. Q: Can children enrolled in a Head Start Program be considered automatically eligible for free meals/milk without a completed application?
- A: Yes, in certain cases. A child shall be considered eligible for free meals/milk without further application or eligibility determination if the child is enrolled as a participant in the Head Start Program under the Head Start Act; e.g., the child must be part of Head Start's "funded enrollment." The child must be determined, by the Head Start grantee, to be a member of a family that meets the low-income criteria prescribed under the Head Start Act. For more detailed information regarding eligibility for Head Start children contact the State agency.

#### **Offering More Than One Reimbursable Lunch/Breakfast**

1. Q: If the school offers a choice of reimbursable meals at the same price or at different prices, must all options be available to free and reduced price meal recipients?
- A: Yes. In an effort to increase participation, schools may offer students a choice of reimbursable meals. One meal may be more expensive because of a special meal item. All recipients must be able to take any one of the meals. Students receiving free and reduced price meal benefits may not be required to pay an additional charge for more expensive meals.